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UPON THE INDIAN DEPENDS MEXICO'S FUTURE

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The year 1920 will perhaps figure in Mexico's history as the most momentous since that of 1821 when Mexico first attempted to walk alone. The overturning of the Carranza government may mean the first real, though somewhat uncertain, step toward self-government as we know it here in the United States. This assumption is predicated on the fact that the Mexicans are weary of war, after a nine years' orgy of bloodshed, during which time almost every crime was committed in the name of liberty and of democracy.

Much of the confusion which has clouded the minds of many observers of Mexican affairs has been occasioned by non-consideration of the history of the Mexican people and the consequent failure to comprehend the true character of the natives. It is but natural that North Americans should apply the yardstick of experience in measuring the happenings and judging of the future of the republic to the south of them, but such a procedure must inevitably result in wrong conclusions. The first question, therefore, which one must endeavor to answer, in order to dispassionately judge the present-day Mexican situation, is: Who are the Mexican people?

Their beginning is shrouded in mystery. No field offers such fascination for the archeologist. We know from the ruins of Palenque and of Mitla that a race peopled Mexico some 2000 years before Christ. From the inscriptions chiseled on the ruins of the stone temples which have been unearthed it seems probable that these people were star-worshippers and their hieroglyphics bear a resemblance to those of the early Assyrians and Egyptians.

The beginnings of Mexico, however, cannot be traced to this dim past. The modern Mexican is a descendant of the Toltecs and the Aztecs. Just what influence the first of these races had in moulding the character of the present-day people is questionable. The Toltecs left imposing monuments in the shape of great pyramids rivaling some of those of Egypt. The best two examples of these which have endured until today are those at San Juan de Teotihuacan, about thirteen miles southeast of Mexico City, and one at Cholula on the outskirts of the City of Puebla.

The real forefathers of the present-day Mexicans were the Aztecs. These people were of undoubted Mongolian origin and their migrations from that part of the United States now occupied by the States of Oregon, California, Arizona and New Mexico, into Old Mexico, can be easily traced to this day. We know that these people had some strong qualities; that they had imagination, and some capacity for civil government and a sort of genius for building. All this can be read in the structures which they left in New Mexico, in Chihuahua and in the ruins of the Teocali which was built upon the site of the present Cathedral in Mexico City.

When Hernando Cortez, with his little band of supermen, landed at Vera Cruz and burned his ships behind him, the Aztec was the dominant race in Mexico. If we can rely upon the very fascinating accounts of Prescott and the garrulous notes of that old *conquistador*, Bernal Diaz, we may be sure that these people were in many things as far advanced as were the Europeans of their day. They had built great temples, had an educated priesthood, paid some attention to public instruction, possessed a judiciary, members of which were appointed for life, and had a ruler who was elected to office. We know that they built a great city in the valley of Anahuac in the high plateau region. This city contained 300,000 inhabitants, had a great market place where on certain days a fifth of the population gathered to purchase finely woven cloths, gold and silver ornaments, sweetmeats, and foodstuffs of various kinds. The city was everywhere intersected by canals, for it had been

built upon the bed of a disappearing lake. It was such a community that Cortez and his doughty warriors found after they had fought their way up from the tropics to the foot of the majestic Popocatepetl.

What happened is familiar to all of you. The Spaniards, with insatiable greed for gold and fanatical zeal to advance the cross, crushed these people with a cruelty, the relentlessness of which shocks readers of the history of that period even to this day. It would be unfair to the Spaniard to attribute to him all of the ills of present-day Mexico. Some time ago I heard Vicente Blasco Ibañez, that gifted novelist, brilliant orator and sparkling conversationalist, pay an eloquent tribute to the courage and dauntlessness of this little band that conquered an empire, and they deserved it, if bravery and the spirit of adventure are the only measures to be applied in judging of their conduct. The conquest of Mexico is an epic the like of which has never been paralleled in history. But while the Spaniards built magnificent temples and stamped some of the strength of the Iberian on the country, not even the eloquence of an Ibañez can erase the blot which is all that remains of the civilization of the early Mexican people. There can be no quibble over this fact of history, for we have it from the pen of a Spaniard himself—Las Casas—who devoted his life in an attempt to right the great wrong committed by the Spaniard.

The man from Spain and his descendants dominated Mexico for three centuries, and the work of cruelty begun by Cortez extended over that entire period, until the Mexican became a mere serf, almost a dumb creature. When the war for independence was begun, it was not the Mexicans, but the Spanish creoles who started it. Iturbide was of almost pure Spanish blood and he was the first hero in Mexican history. His empire did not last longer than some of the succeeding presidencies. That Spain wrote her rubrics large across the face of Mexico and the rest of Latin America is a fact; that she crushed the Mexican people in the process is, for our purpose, a more important truth.

Since the last of the Spanish troops, under O'Donojú, marched down the slopes to Vera Cruz, that port through which the Spaniards had first entered the country three centuries before, Mexico, with two exceptions, has been dominated by men of mixed Spanish blood, *mestizos* who have retained the political traits and traditions of the one-time mother country. These men constitute less than three per cent of the population and are known to the outside world and designated by many foreign observers as "the Mexican people." They are not. The real Mexican people consist of some 13,000,000 of Indian blood, the dregs of a once powerful and progressive race. The Mexican problem resolves itself into a question of whether or not these people can come back if the opportunity is given them.

Critics and scoffers of this view point (and unfortunately these two terms are often too nearly synonymous when treating of Mexican affairs) point to the fact that since the days of the first presidency of Guadalupe Victoria, in 1821, there have been seventy-three distinct administrations, and that the average tenure of a chief executive of Mexico has been less than one year. This, of course, is historically true, but this long and discouraging record of constant treacheries, revolutions and governmental turnovers was broken by two régimes characterized by real patriotism and progress. Is it not hopeful that these two administrations were those of men of Indian blood?

When we speak of an Indian in Mexico we speak of a Mexican. What are the facts, historically? Seventy-three administrations in less than one hundred years. One of these, that of Benito Juarez, a pure-blooded Indian, saved the sovereignty of his country and drove the foreign invader from its shores; the other, that of Porfirio Diaz, an Indian, gave to the land thirty-six years of peace and prosperity, and a material development and wellbeing which demonstrates the possibilities of the future. Seventy-one administrations by inheritors of Spanish traditions were failures, two by men of Indian blood were successes. Is it not fair to assume that it is within the realm of probability that the Indian can come back?

The character of the Mexican Indian is much misunderstood. He is naturally serious, docile and industrious. Centuries of domination have made him childlike, and for that reason he is easily led. The *mestizo*, politician and military chieftain, take full advantage of this trait and thus find it comparatively easy to keep the revolutionary pot boiling. Under the leadership of such men the Indian has committed horrible atrocities, but the belief that by nature he is bloodthirsty and warlike is wholly erroneous.

For the past nine years the Indian has been fighting furiously, now at the beck of one leader, again at the call of another. There are abundant signs at present that this sort of thing is at last palling upon him; that after decades of deceit he is beginning to see the light. He is tired of fighting. He is commencing to see that the type of leader he has so long blindly followed is more interested in sustaining himself than in ruling for the benefit of the country. In this awakening lies the hope of the future for Mexico.

Two factors have been largely responsible for this change in the native Mexican. One of these has been the disillusionment resulting from years of bloody fighting which have brought him nothing but poverty and misery; the other, the uplifting influence of great American and other foreign business enterprises and American business men who have gone into his country to develop its natural resources. No single thing has done as much to promote the welfare of the Mexican of the lower class as has the example of the progressive foreigner. Americans built the railways in Mexico, more than 15,000 kilometers of them. In doing so they developed artisans, such as machinists, carpenters, blacksmiths, and a multitude of other skilled craftsmen. They raised the standards of living and the daily wage of the worker. They did this deliberately, and the influence of these pioneer builders spread to other great concerns operating mines, mills and factories. These mechanics formed the nucleus of the middle class which in the near future will for the first time in the history of Mexico begin to assert itself. These Americans taught, but they did so by example rather than by precept. Mexico has an educational sys-

tem, but like much that was inherited from Spain it is hollow—a matter of form rather than substance. The great need of the people today is for vocational training, and the genius of the American for organization will supply this if he is given an opportunity to help the Mexican to develop the vast riches of his country. This is the only kind of intervention that is thinkable. Armed intervention by the United States would be a calamity, the effects of which would be felt for many decades to come in the suspicion and lack of esteem in which the United States would be held by the other republics of the western hemisphere. Such a movement would be a mistake, not only from the standpoint of justice, but also from that of political expediency.

The two great dangers which confront the present Government are those of militarism and the inaccessibility of vast stretches of territory which make the Central Government little more than a name to the people inhabiting them. Militarism has always been the curse of Mexico and if the liberal government, which has just taken over the reins of power, allows itself to be dominated by the ambitions of the various chieftains who have hastened to give it allegiance, it will be in great danger of going the way of other governments. Nullifying this threat of disaster is the general sentiment of the country against a further continuance of fighting of any kind.

Conditions existing at the present time are somewhat analogous to those which prevailed in the early seventies, just before Porfirio Diaz assumed supreme control. At that time the country had been bled white by a succession of revolutions which had stretched over the previous half century. It wanted a strong hand at the helm to stamp out banditry and give the people an opportunity to follow their peaceful pursuits. Diaz proved to be such a man. Will Obregon measure up to these standards? Those who know him well believe that he will do so. He is young, vigorous and patriotic and his expressed desire to live on friendly terms with the United States will greatly aid him in his tremendous task. Carranza might have been the

greatest man in Mexican history had he been willing to link the destinies of his country with those of the United States and her allies in the great world war. When he chose to do otherwise he sealed his doom.

Even with peace, the task of reconstruction in Mexico is one that calls for administrative genius of the highest order. Few people realize the great extent of Mexico territorially. It has more than 767,000 square miles, comprising an area greater than all of Western Europe, and equalling that of Great Britain, France, Belgium, Holland, Denmark, the German Empire, Switzerland, Italy, Greece and Cuba. Although telegraphic communication is maintained with practically all of this territory, and more than 10,000 miles of railway connect up its principal cities, there are still entire regions where the inhabitants live in most primitive style, weaving the fabrics for their very simple clothing and obtaining their food as did their ancestors centuries before. Often these people know no Spanish, speaking their native dialects of which philologists tell us there are sixty-five separate and distinct ones. To attempt to judge Mexico by its capital city, or by the various other thriving centers of population in some of the better known states, is as futile as to try to get a picture of our own country by examining a cross-cut section of the East Side of the City of New York.

There are certain natural and economic laws which work inevitably. Because of her geographical position, Mexico must always be closely linked to the United States of America. No false Chauvinism on the part of Mexican politicians can change this condition of affairs. Furthermore, the vast riches of the country are needed by the entire world. This is an age of steel and oil, and just as coal and iron spelled dominance in the past half century, so these two first mentioned commodities will determine leadership in the present. Mexico is rich in the elements of both of these. She is also abundantly provided with everything else man wants. What Baron Humboldt said more than a century ago is true today: Mexico is "The Treasure House of the World." If her people can be aided and

guided in developing them, her future is secure; but always it is essential to differentiate the Mexican people from the Mexican politician.

I have found it helpful, in trying to think logically on the Mexican question, to consider that country as a patient and to endeavor through an analysis of the happenings of the past to arrive at a diagnosis that may be reasonable, intelligent and sympathetic. There is nothing uncomplimentary intended towards that nation in this method of approach for I have always been a warm admirer of the Republic and its people.

It is undeniable that Mexico is suffering from a disease which from time to time during the past one hundred years has threatened its existence as a sovereign State. It is deep seated and its source can be traced to the Iberian peninsula and the Spaniard. Like most grave illnesses it is complicated, and seemingly contradictory evidence baffles the efforts of the diagnostician. It is the sick man of the West as is Turkey of the East. It is suffering from an ailment produced by the political philosophy of the Iberian as contrasted with that of the Anglo Saxon. It is interesting to speculate on what might have happened had the foreign penetration of the Aztec Empire been postponed one hundred years and a man of the stripe of Sir Walter Raleigh had sailed into the harbor of Vera Cruz instead of one of the ilk of that giant of adventuresomeness, Hernan Cortez.

While there is much to admire in the character of the Spaniard and some of the pages he has written in history are unmatched by the achievements of any other, the genius for self-government is not one of these. This is true despite the fact that individualism is the basic note of Spanish psychology, an Iberian characteristic which has all the force of an imperious atavism, and that the present-day Latin American is the product of that fierce strain of religious fanaticism which the Moors brought into Spain, and of that assertive love of self-government expressed in the charter of Leon in the year 1020, antedating the Magna Charta wrested from King John and making liberty and democracy of more ancient date in Spain than in England.

What is wanted now in Mexico is an invasion of capital, books, ideas and ideals which shall rid the country of the political poison which lingers as a Spanish inheritance. This is the sort of an intervention which will be the salvation of that country. Whether or not it will come depends upon the attitude of the new régime towards the outside world, and, particularly, the United States of America.